

The Successful Union Leader

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Leadership Tips from  LifeSolutions®

Depression is becoming common in the population. It affects millions and limits an individual's effectiveness and performance. Union leaders are not expected to diagnose or treat depression. However, they are in a position to identify when a member is demonstrating deteriorating behavior that could indicate an underlying problem with depression. While treatment should be left to the professionals, a leader can encourage a member to utilize MAP resources when depression is suspected. This Successful Union Leader points you to some of the tools you'll need: information, skills, and strategies. We are always interested in your feedback and/or questions. Please email your questions and/or comments to ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com or call an account manager at 1.855.209.8762.

Annette Kolski-Andreaco, LSW, MSW, MURP –Manager, Account Services

Understanding the Problem

Depression is a medical condition for which effective treatment is readily available. If someone appears depressed, it is helpful to suggest that he or she consider getting an evaluation for possible treatment. Symptoms can range from a mild dysphoria (anxiety, discontent, fatigue, and sadness) to a deeply persistent experience of despair, hopelessness, negativity, and loss of focus that can seriously affect body, mood, and thought. At this point, the individual is generally very aware of being unhappy (though he or she may not know how to cope with it), and others are likely to notice that something is not quite right. Symptoms of depression can be triggered by a combination of factors, including biochemistry, genetics, thought patterns, environmental and family relationships, medical conditions, and stress. Consider the following:

- ◆ Depression is found in 15% of the population at any one time.
- ◆ Females are twice as likely as males to experience depression.
- ◆ Depression continues to be the leading cause of disability in the workplace.
- ◆ More than 70% of the people who are diagnosed with depression are employed.
- ◆ Among suicides, depression is the primary psychiatric disorder.
- ◆ Depression is the cause of 16,000 deaths annually.
- ◆ Hidden workplace costs include poor decision-making, accident proneness, errors, and dysfunctional relationships with coworkers.

The Union Leader's Role

As noted earlier, it is not the union leader's job to diagnose or counsel individuals regarding mental health issues. It is not helpful to the individual to ignore deteriorating performance out of compassion because it only serves to delay the person getting the help he may need. Leaders can do several things to support a member:

1. Maintain expectations while offering resources.
2. Communicate concerns regarding performance or behaviors *without diagnosing*.
3. Encourage the employee to seek help.

Four Key Skills

- ◆ **Observation** involves paying attention to patterns and behaviors and **documenting** patterns – the what, when, where, and frequency of the behaviors.
- ◆ **Constructive dialogue** is asking if there is a personal problem and offering understanding but avoid counseling or diagnosis.
- ◆ **Consultation with MAP** should occur if you are unsure about how to approach a member who is struggling with an issue.
- ◆ **Follow up** with the member means you offer support when you notice improvements. Recovery from depression, like most serious illnesses, takes time.

LifeSolutions consultants are always available to answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to contact us at 1.855.209.8762.

Sources:

1. Elinson, Lynn, et al. *Depression and the Ability to Work*. Psychiatric Services. 2004; 55(1):29-34.
2. Dixon, Kevin. Remarks at Picower Institute for Learning and Memory "On Depression" symposium at Massachusetts Institute for Technology, quoted in "Direct Costs of Depression in the Workplace Are Tip of the Iceberg; Employers Have Huge Stake in Promoting Depression Treatment." PRNewswire. Oct. 13, 2005
3. Lerner D, Adler DA, Chang H, Lapitsky L, Hood MY, Perissinotto C, Reed J, McLaughlin TJ Berndt ER, Rogers WH. *Psychiatr Serv*. 2004; 55(12):1371-1378.
4. Depression in the Workplace: A special Publication from Managed Care Magazine, VOLUME 1, NO.1, Spring 2006.

Nothing in this information is a substitute for following your organization's policies related to information covered here.